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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: NEW CENTER-RIGHT "ATAMEKEN" PARTY HOLDS  
FOUNDING CONGRESS, BEGINS REGISTRATION PROCESS

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¶11. (SBU) Summary: On October 27, the organizers of a new political party called "Atameken" (Fatherland) held their founding congress in Almaty. The party is styled as a center-right party committed to championing the middle class and small and medium-size entrepreneurs. Although presidential son-in-law Timur Kulibayev is purportedly backing the party, no well-known business leaders or other officials were visible at the congress, and the event received very little attention in the media. The party must now collect 50,000 petition signatures and open offices in each oblast in order to complete registration as a political party. End summary.

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THE PARTY PLATFORM  
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¶12. (SBU) On October 27, Poloff and PolFSN attended the legally required founding congress of the new Atameken party, held at the Kazakh-British University in Almaty. Poloff also met with party organizers after the congress. According to party documents and the organizers, the party is intended to emulate the conservative parties in the United Kingdom and Canada, the Republican Party in the United States, and the Union of Right Forces in Russia, among others.

¶13. (U) The party plans to champion the interests of the middle class, particularly the owners of small and medium-sized businesses. Party leaders condemned the systemic corruption in Kazakhstan, which hinders small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in the development of the middle class. The party's declaration of principles advocates economic reforms to strengthen the free market, judicial independence, tax cuts for small and medium-size businesses, and greater media freedom, among other things. The leaders of two groups of disabled citizens endorsed the party, and several speakers pledged to fight for the rights of disabled people. Overall, the party leadership was careful to indicate their support for President Nazarbayev, and much of the party's ideas were presented in the context of supporting the president's vision for Kazakhstan.

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THE PARTY CHAIRMAN  
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¶14. (U) The public driving force behind the new party is Yerzhan Dosmukhamedov, a western-educated political activist, consultant, and member of the Presidential Council on Entrepreneurship. Dosmukhamedov is an advisor to presidential son-in-law and KazMunaGaz president Timur Kulibayev, and has held a number of government and advisory positions in recent years. In a series of articles and published interviews in the year leading up to the

founding congress, Dosmukhamedov laid out his vision for a party of entrepreneurs and the reforms it would advocate. The collection of articles and interviews was available in book form at the congress, and included a complimentary letter from Margaret Thatcher. The delegates unanimously elected Dosmukhamedov chairman of the new party.

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THE FOUNDING CONGRESS  
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15. (SBU) At the congress, Dosmukhamedov announced that 1,112 delegates from 12 oblasts were present. (Note: Kazakhstani law requires new political parties to hold a founding congress with at least 1000 delegates, representing at least two-thirds of the oblasts in the country. End note.) Poloff and Pol FSN observed several hundred fewer people in the congress hall. The congress started late, and in general seemed disorganized and low-budget. A large segment of the attendees were university students who were given the day off from class to attend. They were prohibited from leaving early. Many were attentive and interested, but several did not know why they were there. Likewise, a number of disabled citizens were transported to the congress, but several did not know the purpose of the gathering.

16. (SBU) No well-known business leaders or other officials were visible at the congress. Approximately 10 journalists attended a press conference after the event, but the congress received very little coverage in the press. On the day before the congress, Poloff met with opposition leaders Tulegen Zhukeev, cochairman of the True Ak Zhol Party, and Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, chairman of the Civil Society foundation. Neither was aware of the impending founding congress, and both predicted that President Nazarbayev would not allow a new political party associated with Timur Kulibayev, given recent moves to merge pro-presidential parties with the dominant Otan Party.

17. (U) In order to become a registered party, Atameken leaders must

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register 50,000 members in the next two months, with at least 700 members from each oblast and the cities of Astana and Almaty. Within six months of registration, the party must open and register branch offices in each oblast and the cities of Astana and Almaty.

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COMMENT  
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18. (SBU) Comment: Dosmukhamedov's writings and public comments reveal a consistent and articulate vision of political reforms designed to fight corruption, help the middle class, and promote small and medium-sized businesses. Dosmukhamedov is clearly a savvy political operator with close ties to first son-in-law Timur Kulibayev. Despite his organizational and public relations efforts, however, the Atameken founding congress was an unimpressive event that received little public attention. The founding congress nevertheless served its legal purpose, and assuming the party is registered it may prove to be a useful vehicle for Kulibayev's future political ambitions. In the meantime, the party's success or failure in Kazakhstan's complex party registration process will shed light on whether it has sufficient high-level consent to survive in a political landscape that has recently seen the dominant Otan Party swallow other pro-presidential parties. End comment.

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